

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, January 15, 1893, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. Beinn Bhreagh, Sunday Jan. 15th, 1893. My dear Mrs. Bell:

Yesterday we had the all too rare pleasure of a letter from you.

I am so sorry that it is so cold in Washington. You had better come here to get warm! We do not have anything like 15 below zero here, the coldest we have ever had was 5 below, and that was only for one night. But we have had the thermometer above freezing for some time. The last day or two has been very calm and still and the ice has had a chance to form, so today for the first time, we had the pleasure of seeing a skating party cross from our wharf to Crescent Grove. I believe that another party went over from Mr. McInnis' also. This morning the ice was perfectly beautiful, smooth and glassy like a mirror in which the trees were reflected, but it is snowing hard now and I fear the skating is spoilt. I am sorry for we have not had much of it. Our only water is so deep that Alec wont 1st us go on it until it is strong enough to bear the weight of horse and sleigh, so we have not had the fun others have enjoyed. The harbor and upper part of the bay however, have been passable for sleighs some time, and even Alec has been across the ice in the carriage with two heavy horses. He did not altogether enjoy the drive however, especially on account of the big holes cut by eel and trout fishermen right in the track of the carriage.

I don't know how Aileen is going to get home, there is only a small piece of open water in the middle of the lake. I expect that we shall have to drive around nearly to Little Narrows, thence back again and around Watchabucket to Grand Narrows, a journey of twenty or 2 thirty miles to accomplish too. However I feel that we did well in staying. Elsie has improved so wonderfully in mind and body the last few months. But I cannot help dreading the experiment of a return to Washington and the entrance in a regular school. It is all very

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well to say that I can take her out at any time if I find she is not doing well, but the moral effect on her of such a step would I fear, be disastrous. Now she thinks herself well as other girls, if she finds she is not, she may be utterly discouraged and that would be very bad for her. However we will hope for the best.

Yesterday Alec and I were quite excited watching a steamer laden with lime for our house force her way through the ice. She could only get along at foots pace and up at the top of the mountain Alec could hear the crunch crunch of the ice as it was ground down under her powerful square barge-like bow. She was a stern wheeler, the first I had ever seen and Alec said a side wheeler could not have got through at all. She was past the point when Alec and I first saw her at the top of the mountain, and yet we had time to walk down its side and on to the point, go all over our house and yet get down to McInnis' wharf before she. Her way was pretty plain steaming through smooth newly formed ice until within three hundred yards of the wharf where she encountered the thick shore floe ice, and it seemed as if she could not get through. However she managed to slowly back and then came on with a rush grounding the ice for fifty yards, and then had to stop, struggle free of the powerful ice grip and then back and come over again. It was hard work and the sun was setting and the ice growing stronger every moment, but just as the sun sank behind Little Narrows she came near enough to throw boards on the wharf and commence unloading for dear life. I was quite excited and could not help applauding with all my might as the captain stepped on the wharf. He had brought the lime from Mantle Mountain, and said there was no ice there, and he was anxious to get back to avoid being caught and kept in the ice all winter.

Our house is getting along quite rapidly now. The men have hardly lost an entire day on account of cold, and it is very much warmer there than here, the trees keep off all cold winds. The framework of the main part of the house is all up, it is only a story and a half high you know, so that the second story will not be complete until they put the roof timbers on. They have the floor of the second story nearly all down, and all of the first story floor although the masons have not quite finished the stone foundations of the kitchen

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extension. They are beginning to board up the main first story and all the partition beams are up. It looks like a pretty big house, quite as large if not larger on the ground than Twin Oaks, but not so large because having only two stories instead of three. They say they can see the house from the Narrows.

We are very much interested just now in an effort that is being made to establish a kindergarten here. It is the idea of the present principal of the Academy here, a Harvard College graduate and a great friend of Aileen's who is out walking with him now in all the snow-storm, her first outing in a fortnight. He is to address our club on Thursday and then we are going to see if it will pay to call a public meeting to start the school. Our club is getting to be quite a power in the land & you see. We are arranging for a public meeting in March when three of the oldest inhabitants will give us their recollections of the early days of Baddeck, and we mean to publish them afterwards in book form. Then we are going to invite a gentleman all the way from New Glasgow to address us.

Much love dear Mrs. Bell to you and Mr. Bell and my cousins.

Ever your affectionate daughter, Mabel.